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FUTURE SOVIET INTERESTS IN ARMS CONTROL

SUMMARY

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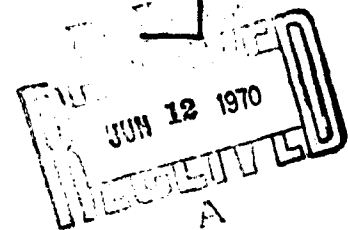
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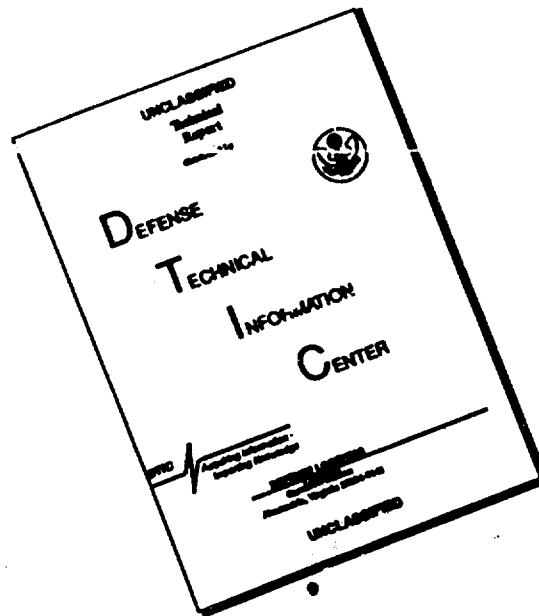
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FUTURE SOVIET INTERESTS IN ARMS CONTROL

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SUMMARY

By every measure available to an outside observer, the incentives for arms control as a means of furthering national interests have been rising in the Soviet Union over the last year or two. For the first time since the beginning of the strategic missile race, the Soviet Union has achieved a military position relative to the United States adequate to support its claim to the credentials of equality in the major dimensions of great-power status. It has acquired a land-based intercontinental missile force that is now roughly equal to the comparable American force in numbers of launchers. It is on the way to acquiring improved conventional capabilities that will enhance its ability to project its power into areas remote from the homeland. These two capabilities are linked in the sense that the Soviet Union's freedom of action to use its conventional forces is dependent on the stability of the strategic equilibrium to which its strategic forces contribute. The present strategic balance is one which the Soviet Union would not wish to see upset, since the gains to be anticipated from the kind of hold-and-explore strategy which this equilibrium makes possible are clearly among the more important considerations affecting Soviet policy objectives for the 1970's.

The critical question posed for the Soviet Union by the arms control issue, however, is not merely whether the present military balance is satisfactory, but whether it is preferable to the situation that may be in store if the arms race goes on. The next few years in weapons developments will place heavy demands on highly advanced scientific and technological capabilities--resources in which the United States is now more generously endowed than the Soviet Union. The nature of the arms competition in prospect seems likely to put severe strains on the Soviet Union as time goes on. But entirely apart from the question whether the Soviet Union is able to maintain a satisfactory relative position in terms of overall military power, the escalation of the competition to new levels of engineering virtuosity would introduce new elements of uncertainty into the strategic relationship. Thus, even without substantial changes in the real military balance between the two sides, the psychological components of the deterrence relationship--the confidence of each side that it understands the capabilities and intentions of the other--could be fatally impaired. The result could be a revival of the fears and suspicions which prompted the first sharp spurts in the arms race in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

The economic burdens of the arms race are likely to reinforce these considerations favoring an effort to reach an arms control agreement. These burdens have long worked to constrain the Soviet

Union's ability to satisfy consumer needs and to make the investments in new plant and machinery necessary to insure future economic growth. Military expenditures have increased annually since 1965, and, relative to the growth of the economy as a whole, investments have declined during the same period. To what extent an arms control agreement might alleviate these problems cannot be calculated without detailed information on the scope of the agreement to be reached. But no exact analysis is needed to suggest the scale of the savings to be derived from an agreement that would halt the further deployment of strategic offensive and defensive missile systems. The prospect of deriving savings of this general order from an arms control agreement would be a significant factor affecting Soviet attitudes toward the issue. The more so, since the need for resources to support the maintenance and expansion of Soviet general-purpose forces is likely to remain high.

Along with these direct implications of an arms control agreement, other considerations relating to the Soviet Union's broader foreign policy objectives and concerns are likely to play a part in shaping its attitudes toward the issue. Its interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to nonnuclear states, particularly West Germany, for example, works to reinforce the incentives prompting it to consider an arms control agreement with the United States. Indeed, the nonproliferation treaty which it co-sponsored and signed expressly calls for forward movement by the Soviet Union and the United States toward such an agreement. But beyond this, the Soviet Union regards the prevention of West German access to the control of nuclear weapons as a cardinal objective of its foreign policy. It can be expected, therefore, to employ whatever bargaining leverage the prospective arms limitation talks with the United States may give it to bring pressure on the Federal Republic to sign the nonproliferation treaty.

More generally, the overall approach that the Soviet Union takes to European affairs in the 1970's will be an important part of the complex of factors affecting its arms control policy. Broadly speaking, it has two alternative lines of policy available to it: either to work toward stabilizing its relationships with the United States, with the aim of maintaining and strengthening the current bipolar arrangements of power in Europe, or to work to exploit the divisive tendencies in Europe, with the aim of expanding its own influence in European affairs. The implications for its arms control policy that might flow from the line it chooses to stress would be neither direct nor single-valued. But it would obviously be easier to pursue arms limitation talks with the United States in an atmosphere of general accommodation. Conversely, it might make sense to shift the emphasis to regional schemes of arms control if the aim were to encourage changes in the current structure

of European relations. Whether the emphasis in arms control policy would be a product of the emphasis in European policy, or vice versa, is hard to say. But it is clear that the instability of the factors affecting the question of power in Europe introduces an important element of contingency into the conditions bearing on Soviet arms control policy for the 1970's.

Much the same can be said about the role of the "China factor" in Soviet policy, although its influence on Soviet arms control policy at the current stage is probably less than might appear at first glance. Its main impact lies in the limitations it imposes on the scope of any arms control agreement that the Soviet Union could accept. The border threat that China poses, for example, would seem to rule out the possibility that the Soviet Union could accept any substantial limitations affecting the size, deployment, or equipment of its conventional forces. Similarly, the developing Chinese nuclear capability would make it difficult for the Soviet Union to foreswear the option of developing and maintaining appropriate ABM defenses. Over the longer run, however, the development of Chinese nuclear power threatens to introduce a serious destabilizing factor into the current bipolar structure of world power. To this extent, the China factor no doubt works to reinforce the incentives that are prompting the Soviet Union to seek arrangements with the United States calculated to stabilize the superpower strategic relationship.

It seems inevitable, given the nature of the arms control issue, that there will be differences of opinion among the Soviet policy-makers regarding the expediency of talks with the United States, and that the groups and institutions within Soviet society with special interests in the issue will seek to influence the decisions taken. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the issue has already provoked controversy within the regime. How the sides line up is largely a matter of inference, but it may be surmised that the more experimental elements of the party and state bureaucracy are on the side of the regime's current policy. They would include the economic modernists, the men who have acquired a personal and professional stake in programs that would be aided by cutbacks in military expenditures, the scientific and technical experts who know enough about the capabilities of modern weapons to be skeptical about the wisdom of relying on them as instruments of policy, and the foreign policy specialists who have developed a professional interest in the arms control problem. On the other side are the members of the powerful special interests groups, largely military, who regard arms control not only as a threat to their institutional interests, but as an unwise gamble with national security.

There is little evidence to indicate where the individual Soviet leaders stand on the arms control issue. While it is a safe assumption that a majority, though probably a slim one, favor exploratory talks, there is little reason to believe that they have a mandate for anything more at this time. However compelling the reasons for an agreement might seem to some leaders, the considerations others will find to oppose arms control will also carry considerable weight. For the more moderate leaders, the potential benefits, particularly budgetary ones, may outweigh the dangers they no doubt see in lowering their psychological guard against the United States. Others in the leadership, who champion the causes of the military and ideological orthodoxy, almost certainly weigh the balance of dangers and benefits differently.

In brief, the Soviet Union is moving toward arms control talks with the United States under mixed compulsions and constraints. There are compelling reasons why the Soviet Union should seek ways of moderating the arms race, and persuasive reasons why it should move cautiously toward that end. There are strong political forces in the regime favoring the movement toward the talks, and other forces opposing it, fearful that the momentum of the talks may propel the leaders into unsound agreements. The Soviet Union's decision to enter the talks does not resolve these contradictions: the policymakers will continue to operate under intense and conflicting pressures throughout the course of any forthcoming negotiations. But it does indicate that the incentives for talks are presently stronger than the inhibitions opposing them.

It can be assumed from the conditions that have brought the Soviet Union this far toward the conference table that the Soviet objective in talks with the United States will be to bring about a stabilization of the current military balance. It follows that the prospects for success in the talks will depend to some extent on the ability of the United States to avoid upsetting the balance. Moving ahead with MIRV deployments, accelerating ABM programs, or expanding ICBM forces substantially beyond present levels, would almost certainly destroy the preconditions for agreements. Military measures of a more modest nature such as the US decision to proceed with a limited ABM deployment, seem unlikely, however, to pose serious blocks to an agreement.

Once the talks get started, the Soviet Union can be expected to press for the acceptance of a set of ground rules to govern the progress of the negotiations and the shape of any agreements that may emerge from it. Judging by Soviet declaratory policy and pre-negotiatory tactics, these would include an insistence on separating strategic arms control issues from other policy issues, the exclusion of conventional forces from the subject matter of the

talks, the exclusion of research and development from the scope of any agreement, and the exclusion of foreign inspection from the machinery of any verification procedures.

The Soviet decision to seek talks with the United States probably reflects a serious intention to seek agreements. The main constraint as far as the Soviet Union is concerned is the one imposed by its unwillingness to accept foreign inspection on its own territory. This might rule out some possible agreements, but not necessarily all. There are a variety of schemes that can be imagined that would satisfy Soviet sensitivities on this score and yet fall within the range of possibilities that might provide a basis for negotiation. A moratorium on further deployments of ICBM's, for example, coupled with a standdown on defensive missile systems, could be monitored by national means of surveillance alone. Such a relatively simple arrangement would go far toward meeting the Soviet Union's objective of stabilizing its military relationship with the United States, without saddling it with obligations that might infringe on its freedom of action in matters not covered by the arms limitation agreement.

The opening of the strategic arms limitation talks will mark the opening of a new stage in the Soviet-American strategic relationship. If the talks lead to agreements, both sides stand to profit, since the interests of both sides lie in forestalling a new escalation of the arms race. If they fail, the compelling motives that led the two sides to the conference table will not necessarily lose their force. In these circumstances, the utility of exploring some of the more modest items that have appeared from time to time on the international arms control agenda may acquire new importance. Such items as nuclear-free zones, the selective reductions of conventional forces, and limitations on the international transfer of arms, for example, might provide opening wedges for discussions that could lead to a relaxation of tensions around international trouble spots. However modest the scope of the agreements that might emerge from such discussions, they would serve at least to preserve the momentum of bilateral discussions and, thus, work to prepare the ground for new efforts at mutual accommodation on the broader issues posed by the arms race.